

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-1141
CHARLES MEDD

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ELECTION '76: THE BLACKS AND THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

ANNCR:

NEWS ANALYST CHARLES MEDD, BACK FROM LAST WEEK'S DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION IN NEW YORK CITY, HAS SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ONE GROUP OF DEMOCRATS THAT STOOD OUT FROM BEGINNING TO END.

VOICE:

IN ONE SHORT WEEK THE DEMOCRATS MANAGED TO RECONSTRUCT THEIR OLD AND OFTEN-FRAYED PARTY COALITION OF LIBERALS, LABOR, THE SOUTH AND THE RACIAL MINORITIES. HOW LONG THEY WILL STAY TOGETHER IS, OF COURSE, ANOTHER MATTER, BUT THE GROUP LEAST LIKELY TO MOVE -- BASED ON ITS COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE AT LAST WEEK'S CONVENTION -- IS THE BLACKS.

FROM THE OPENING DAY, WHEN CONGRESSWOMAN BARBARA JORDAN PROVED THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR ELOQUENCE IN POLITICAL ORATORY, TO THE FINAL BENEDICTION BY THE REVEREND MARTIN LUTHER KING, SENIOR, BLACKS PLAYED NOT JUST VISIBLE ROLES BUT SUBSTANTIVE ONES AS WELL: THE MAYOR OF LOS ANGELES, THOMAS BRADLEY, CHAIRED THE DEBATE OVER PARTY RULES; ANDREW YOUNG, THE FIRST MEMBER OF HIS RACE FROM THE DEEP SOUTH ELECTED TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS IN THIS CENTURY, WAS AMONG THREE SPEAKERS TO NOMINATE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JIMMY CARTER; AND ANOTHER BLACK CONGRESSMAN, RONALD DELLUMS OF CALIFORNIA, LED THE FLOOR FIGHT TO AMEND THE PARTY PLATFORM.

THE LIST GOES ON, AND IT REFLECTS A POLITICAL FACT OF LIFE: BLACK INFLUENCE AT THIS NATIONAL CONVENTION WAS A DIRECT OUTGROWTH OF BLACK INFLUENCE ON THE EVENTS THAT PRECEDED IT -- NAMELY, THE NOMINATING PROCESS. ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY

ELECTION CAMPAIGN SHOWS THAT IN CRITICAL STATE CONTESTS IT WAS BLACK SUPPORT THAT BROUGHT GOVERNOR CARTER FROM OBSCURITY TO TRIUMPH. WITHOUT THE BLACK VOTE, CARTER WOULD HAVE LOST TO GEORGE WALLACE IN THE EARLY FLORIDA ELECTION. WITH IT, HE WAS ABLE TO ELIMINATE WALLACE A FEW WEEKS LATER IN NORTH CAROLINA. BLACK VOTES -- RECENT SURVEYS SHOW -- PRESERVED NARROW CARTER VICTORIES IN WISCONSIN AND MICHIGAN, AND THEY WERE A MAJOR FACTOR IN HIS CONVINCING WIN IN OHIO.

ABOUT ONE IN EVERY NINE OF THE CONVENTION SEATS WAS OCCUPIED BY BLACK DELEGATES, A SLIGHT DROP FROM NINETEEN SEVENTY-TWO WHEN THE CONTROVERSIAL QUOTA SYSTEM WAS APPLIED TO ENSURE MATHEMATICAL REPRESENTATION BY RACE, SEX AND AGE. THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, MOST BLACKS WERE ELECTED IN THE SAME PRIMARY PROCESS THAT HELPED NOMINATE JIMMY CARTER.

WHEN THE DEMOCRATS ENDED THEIR FOUR-DAY MEETING WITH THE SONG "WE SHALL OVERCOME" -- THE CIVIL RIGHTS HYMN OF THE NINETEEN SIXTIES -- THERE WAS A KIND OF COLLECTIVE LUMP IN THE CONVENTION THROAT, A FEELING SHARED BY MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WATCHING ON TELEVISION. AS A WASHINGTON POST COMMENTATOR LATER PUT IT, THAT EMOTIONAL SCENE WAS A REMINDER NOT OF WHAT IS STILL TO BE DONE IN AMERICAN RACE RELATIONS BUT -- IN HIS WORDS -- OF "HOW FAR AND HOW FAST WE HAVE COME IN THE PAST TWENTY YEARS."

GH/RCS